

The poet of the painters

By Thomas Byrom

FRANK O'HARA:
Early Writing
1946-1950
163pp. \$4.
Poems Retrieved
1950-1966
242pp. \$5.
Edited by Donald Allen
Berkeley, California: Grey Fox Press.

MARJORIE PERLOFF:
Frank O'Hara
Poet Among Painters
\$2.50. New York: George Braziller.
1972.

Some poets should be allowed to wear their talents lightly. Frank O'Hara, who was run over by a dune buggy on Fire Island just over ten years ago, has been badly overdone by his friends and devotees, with their disfiguring puffs and silly elegies, some of which Marjorie Perloff lists in her *Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters*. Allen Ginsberg's "City Midnight Funk Strains", Patsy Southgate's "Nobody Operates Like an IBM Machine: For Frank O'Hara", Tony Towle's "Sunrise: Ode to Frank O'Hara", James Schuyler's "Buried at Springs", David Shapiro's "Ode (Permit me to take this sleeping man)", Conrad Manega's "In Memory of the Poet Frank O'Hara 1926-1966", Ron Padgett's "Strawberries in Mexico", John Winters' "After Reading Second Avenue: For Frank O'Hara", etc. This is only a shortlist, and Perloff rightly condemns the excess, as well as other too-colourful bits of the legend. But in praising "In Memory of My Feelings" as "one of the great poems of our time" and in setting O'Hara up with Schumann, Brahms, Shelley and Yeats, she perhaps commits an even graver excess. Devotion often makes a dull business of criticism.

But O'Hara is still bobbing. His gifts were for buoyancy, spontaneity and fun. Though he tried to write *de profundis*, his best poems stay closer to the surface and take their joy and verve from the precarious life he led. He was, like Pound but in a smaller pond, the entrepreneur for a generation of artists. After Harvard and a year at Ann Arbor, he got a first-class job at the Museum of Modern Art, and from this perch he befriended and encouraged Pollock, Kline, de Kooning, Frankenthaler, Grace Hartigan, the poets Kenneth Koch, John Ashbery, Allen Ginsberg, Le Roi Jones, John Winters, the composers Virgil Thompson, Ned

Rorem, Ben Weber, the dancers Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, and a hundred more. Between *salon* and *cénacle*, he was the promptest courier, deeply affable and open, loyal first to the Tenth Street School, The Club, the Cedar Tavern and the San Remo, but not a doctrinaire bohemian. In the right season he could swim up town. The preposterousness of this smart world of the Abstract Expressionists and the New York School, where money and art and fame sang more sweetly than ever before, has been exposed completely and quite unfairly by Tom Wolfe in his *The Painted Word*.

This was O'Hara's world and he was in the centre of it, neither hustler nor ideologue, but a high-spirited man with good taste and a lot of affection to spend. He was especially the poet of the painters; he gave them a literacy, as their muse and critic, at a time when theory tended to precede paint and the word directed the image. But his touch was always personal; the public defending could be left to Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, Greenberg and R. M. Schapiro as they were called. O'Hara was a smaller but not less commanding prominence. His art criticism, some of it collected in *Art Chronicles 1954-1966*, is light, fanciful and untheoretical. When he fashions himself after Apollinaire, who discovered the Cubists tucked away in Room 6 of the Salon d'Automne of 1911, we should not take him as seriously as his immortalizers have done. The emulation is a respectful bit of cheek, and a bit of chic too, playful and sassy. He was never so grave, never a campaigner. His manifesto *Personism* (1959) is a comic piece, speaking only for itself, and not, as has been claimed,

with the voices of Rimbaud, Mayakovsky and Pasternak.

His derivations were light-fingered, his tastes catholic and not always deep. Of modern poets he liked nearly everyone—Williams, Stevens, Pound, Crane, Auden, the Beats, the Black Mountain poets, projectivists and objectivists. Eliot and Lowell, however, were too academic. They had prolonged the life of symbolism.

But O'Hara, since his Harvard years, had loved French poetry best, and his work is full of allusions to Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Apollinaire, Reverdy, Tzara, Ponge. He identified in his life with the Dadaists and Surrealists, who like him, bohemian but not derelict, *les chichissimes*, hung out with painters because that was where the action was, the real thing, the front lines. Robert Motherwell's *The Dada Painters and Poets* (1951) was the Vulgate of the avant-garde of the 1950s, and the lofty below Tenth Street were aldy with vertiges, calligrammes, phallustrades, frotings and decalcomanias.

These enthusiasms directed his practice, but to no great event. His Surrealist experiments of the late 1940s and early 1950s are really schoolboy productions. He liked to justify them by talk of "all-over" and "push-and-pull" and the other tags of Abstract Expressionism, but they are poetry of the surface only, in being superficial. In all his early work, *Oranges*, *Memorial Day* 1950, *Second Avenue*, he spoils himself with chancy disjunctions and licentious associations. Auden tried to warn him: "I think you . . . must watch what you're saying, a great danger with any 'surrealist' style, namely of confusing authentic

non-logical relations which arouse wonder with accidental ones which arouse mere surprise and in the end fatigue." It could hardly have been put more sharply or more tactfully.

But, on the whole, O'Hara did not heed the advice, and the French Zen, as Ashbery called it, of these early and middle years is mostly a matter of extravagant gesture. The poet newly collected by Donald Allen in *Early Writing* does not easily carry their literary burdens.

As a Dada poet O'Hara does better. The love of horseplay and the sullen whimsies, the wit that refuses a programme, the uncritical spoofing, the fizziness of the gossip exactly suited him. He revives, for instance, the date poem—"It is 12.20 in New York a Friday"—which imitates "At the Paul Guillaume Gallery" by Pierre Albert-Birot—"The 13th day of November this year of 1917"—or his "Openings"—"The 1st of March, 1919, I was at Rosenberg's where Herbin the painter—a poem which goes on to chat of who was who and who was there, just as, less directly, most of O'Hara's poems do. O'Hara in his turn has been imitated, by Ted Barrigan for instance: "It's 8.54 in Brooklyn it's the 28th of July and . . . Perloff has traced these influences, without making too much of them.

He was not a radical poet but the conservator of an avant-garde, or just barely the latest of an *arrivé-garde*. It is fitting that just before he died he was appointed a curator at the Museum of Modern Art. He was very much a caretaker and a presenter of exhibitions, rather than a historian or a forerunning poet. His aesthetics are from a catalogue of late Victorian camp, a mat-

ter of excellent personal taste, of display, he burned but gently; he drank and talked. Though he tried on logics, the only one that a sociable and less gifted poet could have, the one that Paterson pop, and the one that was a subjective impression, syntax has little of the one inspired appositeness of the technique. It is an accumulation of phrases of an old romance which is constantly renewed by the end's originality of human loss the air the stumbling quiet of the stars all out we are all for the captured time of our being.

There are too many moments in O'Hara when you can tell if he means it, and you laugh away, only to have his irrepressible lack of dignity mock any judgment, even the most deserved. As the poet of New York he reflects uncritically and faithfully and with something of the muddle of his affection, and go deep by staying lovingly and respectfully aloof.

His talent was social, and he was perhaps best in his collaborations, also believed, pace Eliot, that the modern poet was going to find "tradition" a difficult accomplishment. If Eliot's next thing does not come naturally, and it did not for Roethke, then imitation may well be the dreaded stamp of a dominating past. Winterer Roethke, Roethke's sardonic prose alter ego, makes fun of "the Allusionist". Even his sighs have another source. As Dr La Belle says, Roethke's imitation of Roethke tries to excuse his own allusive vulnerability: "Particularly if he is a provincial, far from a good library, or any practicing poet [like Roethke in Michigan] the immediately preceding literary generation (and/or the more precocious around his own age—and not the best of these—may exercise powerful attraction."

Roethke's poems depend on the energized nature that Kenneth Burke defined as "vegetal radicalism". Using the strength of a primal nature, he moves back to the chaos of personal childhood, led by Blake, folk tale, and Mother Goose into a simulated racial and linguistic infancy. Jung and Freud are warmly welcomed, the better to keep Freud out. Roethke called "Praise to the End" "a kind of tensed-up Prelude" and Dr La Belle mounts a cogent case for Romantic structures of discovery in Roethke. But Roethke's nature is not reciprocal. The flow of energy is all inward. "Small, small, glister me forward, Bird, soft-sigh me home." "Reach me rose." "Voice, come out of the silence/Say something." Until the word touches him, Roethke of his child, trapped in a compulsive hell, where wet "fetus of weeds" and "colling ooze" ripen only to the "pickle ball," a dish for fat lips "where my own tongue kissed/My lips awake in mutually masturbatory expression."

In the mid-1950s Roethke achieved regular success in poetry, which he apparently preferred to the leaps and gaps of his crisis poetry. The poems are written in a sort of didactic present, with adult sexuality often the lesson: "By lust alone we keep the mind alive. And grieve into the certainty of love."

His circus animals are freed to turn comic, and Yeats and T. S. Eliot are confidently and publicly used. Now and then, for my taste, these unqualified assertions have the look only of a larger, more comfortable carapace. Dr La Belle sees a true mastery in the poem, though Miss Sullivan is slightly less enthusiastic. In her impressively complete reading of "Meditations of an Old Woman" she finds "The easy philosophical gravity of the lines is a pose that Eliot has worked too well."

Dr La Belle and Miss Sullivan are uncrossed of each other's work. In the years between Dr La Belle's dissertation and her book, Miss Sullivan, as Dr La Belle comments sourly, "made good use of these materials" for her own study. As far as I can tell, Miss Sullivan also gave credit where required. A non-theoretical study of influences is meant to serve as *materia critica*. Miss Sullivan claims modestly to concentrate on the metaphysical aspects of Roethke's poetry, as a personal symbolism to Sigmund Freud's *Theory of the Poem* (1966). The least successful parts of Miss Sullivan's impressive book are the offhand guesses towards other moderns as Roethke's return to the "First Idea" is equated with Roethke's resolutely unenriched avowed nature. Of Roethke's companion and competitors, Miss Sullivan gives Lowell pride of place. Berryman's "A Stride for Roethke" opens her book, but Berryman doesn't tower as in the text. Randall Jarrell goes without notice, and Delmore Schwartz is mentioned once.

The programmatic poem "Open House" may look like a confession, but it is bound up by a claustrophobic trimer. My truths are all foreknown. This anguish self-revealed. I'm naked to the bone. With nakedness my shield. The confessional self is a persona covering something heavy, heavy, "grunt and fart." Roethke later called it, forms part of the mask, not a release from it.

leaning on the john door in the SPOUT while she whispered a song along the keyboard and the surface glitters. To Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing. His best and worst are heard perhaps at the end of his prose piece "You Are Gorgeous and I'm Coming", which is good pornography and bad Scott Fitzgerald.

With the past falling away as an acceleration of nerves thundering and shaking aims its aggregating force like the Metro towards a realm of encircling travel rounding the sound of adventure and becoming ultimately local and intimate repeating the phrases of an old romance which is constantly renewed by the end's originality of human loss the air the stumbling quiet of the stars all out we are all for the captured time of our being.

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is quite undone by the glamour in "For James Dean"; but in "Lana Turner Has Collapsed" he recovers his wit and the surface glitters. His characteristic movement is from flat to fantasy, real to surreal, literal reference to comic reverie, and often he shifts up with panache.

The host of *Poems Retrieved*, in which Donald Allen has gathered many "lost" poems, some O'Hara sent to friends without keeping a copy, some extracted from letters, are about friendships. "A Party Full of Friends" is from Ann Arbor days. "A Sunday Supper" recalls teenage friends. "Mr O'Hara's Sunday Morning Service" is a sketch of a Sunday flying model airplanes with Dick. In the evening they pack up and go home.

I think about theories of flight, and shave perhaps. So all through dinner our clear anxious eyes remain aloft.

These places are still warm. His several reminiscences of Violet Lang—"To Violet Lang," "Le Boeuf Sur La Toit", and a couple in *Selected Poems*—tell us "Not he calls him," as Curator of funny emotions to the mob. "I see New York thru your eyes," a generous lie. And he praises him for having a common ear/for our deep gossip."

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high was his head, incautious in the company
of the might of mountains, and a rock-vent liquid.
His hands moved little, his legs seemed listless,
yet he woke the wind, and exasperated echoes,
wending not to war in a charging chariot,
unhelped by horses whirling like the wind.
Test-tube technology covered him completely.
Seen for a second, he was gone ghostly
as though he had never been. Vouchsafe me this vision!

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Meetings with marvellous persons

By Victoria Gledhill

MAURICE COLLIS:
Diaries 1949-1969
Edited by Louise Collis
216pp. Heinemann. £5.50.

The publication of Maurice Collis's Diaries 1949-1969 was delayed for a year, the book contains some delicate material for which clearance had to be sought. In 1967 Collis was one of three assessors called in to arbitrate in the matter of the price of an equestrian portrait of the Duke of Edinburgh commissioned from Paula Topolski, a close friend of Collis's. No price had been named at the time—Topolski and the Duke were on friendly terms. The portrait was delivered, and nothing happened for nearly two years. Then Topolski sent in his bill, and received a letter in return indicating it was much too large—"We were all thunderstruck," wrote the Duke. (Brownie Astor warned Collis that the Duke was "very rough.") Collis went to Windsor to look at it, and decided that "with the best will in the world" it was impossible to support Topolski's price. It was only "a slight and rapid sketch," unfinished and unresolved. The final price agreed was the average of the three valuations arrived at by the three assessors. It was a delicate matter.

The other delicate matter is the Astor's involvement in the Profumo case, and this is the part of the book which will help to tell it. Collis comes out of it very well, as the loyal friend and supporter of Lord Astor, and of his third wife Brownie after Lord Astor's death. Collis's role in the Profumo case is at his most deferential; living nearby, he was summoned to make up the numbers at short notice, and always rushed to oblige: "At 7 pm Mr Lee, the butler at Cliveden, rang up saying: 'His Lordship finds himself a little short and wonders whether you can come to dinner.'" Hastily changing, he was there, as he always was, by eight. He was rather inclined to bring a fine piece of Chinese porcelain, or his most recent book, and leave it in the hall, to be brought forward at the right moment to show to the most congenial of the generally distinguished guests. He was not in a hurry to go home. "Are you staying the night?" asked the dowager Lady Astor, the formidable Nancy, on one occasion. He said he was not, and she said, "Then why haven't you gone?" Collis replied, "It is not so late." The Astors all have to be in bed by 11," she said.

He did not leave at once, even then, and reports the incident without glibly saying that after this exchange "she again entered into further conversation." What else could she do? On another occasion after dinner at Cliveden, she began to ascend the stairs, and he called a compliment after her. "Shut up," she said. "I was much tougher than the Duke of Edinburgh. At this time, in the early 1950s, she was about eighty and still playing golf, taking cold baths, doing gymnastics night and morning, and had made the very difficult for her son's first two wives.

Collis, at her son Lord Astor's suggestion, undertook to write her biography. At times she was beguiled into reminding for his benefit, at other times she snubbed him in a way that any other biographer would have found insupportable. Collis, however, seems to have been impervious to snubs. Even when she opened an exhibition of his paintings in 1957, and all modern art and modernism, he took it as a compliment. "I told her he was indebted to her."

And indeed for a Viscountess, a very rich woman, aged eighty and only just recovered from flu, to leave her palatial residence in her night to open the exhibition of a man who had never exhibited before was an extraordinary act of kindness, apart altogether from what she actually might say.

light? He adds: "In her own indefinable way she is fond of me." Oh, perhaps she was.

Collis was taken into the Astors' confidence when the Profumo scandal broke. Ward had a cottage on the Cliveden estate; he was a regular visitor to the house, and his guests had the use of the swimming pool, which led to the fateful meeting between Keeler and Profumo. Astor appears in these pages as a nervous, delicate, rather inadequate personality, overshadowed by his mother, and quite out of his depth when the scandal broke. Collis summed up the situation in his diary on June 14, 1953:

Wrote a line to Bill Astor to assure him of my friendship at this moment when he is involved in a drama with which he has nothing to do. With Ward's arrest for keeping a brothel, disclosures affecting many prominent people are likely. Bill will be lucky if he emerges unscathed from what is happening.

Astor did not escape unscathed. He was shattered by the scandal, and mud stuck to him. He was also criticised for not coming forward to defend Ward, but he had no knowledge, according to what he told Collis, that could have helped either the defence or the prosecution. He knew nothing of Ward's private life. Ward had used Astor's Lady Astor told Collis that Ward had borrowed thousands of pounds from him, promising free osteopathy in return; and Astor paid for Ward's defence. Neither of the Astors believed Ward had been living on immoral earnings; he was not capable, Astor said, of carrying on a business like that. "This I myself knew to be a true estimate of Ward's character," wrote Collis in his diary. "To live on prostitution is a difficult and tiresome way of making money."

After Ward's suicide Astor panicked and wanted to escape further scandal by leaving the country; he was dissuaded from this by his wife's parents, who convinced him that it would ruin his reputation finally. But he never really got over it, and died in 1966. Collis wrote in his diary: "He was one of my oldest friends. The Cliveden period is over. My life will be different."

Shortly before Collis himself died he encountered Edward Heath at an art exhibition, and introduced himself. "I am Maurice Collis," he said. "I have written thirty-five books, some of which were considered bolshy in their day, but I believe there is nothing in them that a modern conservative would object to." Heath listened with "apparent interest" and shook hands charmingly with Collis and his devoted daughter. The incident was typical. There is no knowing whether Heath had heard of Maurice Collis and his thirty-five books, or whether he was, even though his first, *Simpson White*, was a notable success when it came out in 1934 and is still widely remembered.

Collis left seventeen volumes of diaries. In 1949, when this selection begins, he was sixty, an established writer and art critic. Compulsively social, he went up to London from his house in Maidenhead twice a week to meet people and to go to exhibitions, and that is mainly what he writes about. Until he established himself in middle age as a writer, he had endured a somewhat unglorious career in the Indian Civil Service. In Burma he had become interested in Eastern literature, ceramics, sculpture and painting, and had studied Eastern metaphysics with a Buddhist monk, developing "psychic powers" in his daughter writes in her introduction.

His first marriage had already failed by 1913; his second marriage also was disastrous. His daughter writes: "While his mind and character developed, here and there in his life, a small seedling of rage in his mind from a rough world." Mrs Collis stayed at home, isolated and withdrawn; there was, writes the daughter, "a brooding tension" in the house. Mrs Collis did not share the life of her husband, of pictures and books; she never even managed to fall ill and die, only a few years before the author himself died in the disease, cancer.

to the author and his daughter Louise. Success improved her father, she thinks; he mellowed, and "there was also the very close friendship which he and I gradually established between us". He also, she remarks, "conducted numerous love affairs of which his wife never suspected him". These do not appear in the diaries.

The diaries, in fact, are very circumstantial. If not exactly the diary of a nobody, it is all very poetical, with a touch of the Young Vagabond in the thirties. It has become quite a vogue among a certain set. His poems are extremely difficult to understand and are written with an allusiveness and compression unusual even for modern poetry. In an anthology of verse selected by a man called Fraser, and just published, a set of contemporary poets are called Empsonians.

It is hard to pin down why this is



"Out" by John Digby, whose witty and inventive collages are on show at Thumb Gallery, 20/21 Drabing Street, London W1 until February 17; a collection of his poems and collages, *Sailing away from Night*, is also published this month (Serp. Anvil Press Poetry, £1.30) and a reading from the poems is to be held at Thumb Gallery on the evening of Tuesday, February 7. This is the first exhibition of John Digby's collages in this country, although he has already exhibited in the United States; his work is also included in the group exhibition of contemporary Surrealists now at the Camden Arts Centre. Born in London in 1938, his first job after leaving school at fifteen was in the small bird house at London Zoo; he worked in different sections of the Zoo for six years before leaving to study birds and write poetry. In 1965 he discovered the French Surrealists: "I returned home and destroyed all my previous work and decided to become a Surrealist." (See also cover.)

The farmer's lot

By Pamela Horn

GEORGE ROBINSON:
Heddingham Harvest
Victorian Family Life in Rural England
204pp. Constable. £5.50.

Lincolnshire village life at the end of the past century provides the background for *Heddingham Harvest*. The book is based upon the reminiscences of Geoffrey Robinson's numerous relatives and is a lively picture of life and death.

As the author admits, there is no such village as "Heddingham", and this book is a collection of reminiscences of his chosen community, which offers the opportunity to include every anecdote on unimportant happenings which he has collected within his general local history. The book is, in

particular, devoted to an examination of the sexual appetites of Mr Robinson's maternal grandfather, Edward Fisher, and his sons. Their exploits make Casanova appear a man of virtue.

A similar approach is adopted towards the rector, the Rev Charles Smith, though the reader must question how Mr Robinson knows that Smith had from the age of fourteen been troubled "by the flesh but had been too fearful and shy" to satisfy his needs until as a second-year undergraduate at Cambridge he had his first regular visits to a London brothel. It is most unlikely that he would confide this information to a Lincolnshire villager, or even to the rectory maids with whom he slept—and who included a distant relative of the Fisher family.

This modest preoccupation with sexual matters apart, the book provides an entertaining account of the life in the 1880s and 1890s. Mr Robinson's grandfather decided to spend his time farming in the

so peculiar. It is as if Collis, in his own private diary, were writing something to a foreigner who knew nothing of English literature, understood only basic English.

Perhaps this was because he himself, in a way, always a foreigner. He was Anglo-Irish, born Dublin, with a mother who had "romantic" nature" and "clearly very unstable" (mother's wives make a poor showing in the book); he lived abroad and was middle-aged; the last world perhaps seemed more relevant to him than it was, and continually needed to take bearings and chart his progress; meeting Somerset Maugham for the first time at a party, he notes that they had "absolutely no conversation" and sadly: "He did not speak of books."

He was not, however, without fluency, and he used it well. I clear from these pages that he was a good friend to Lowry, who did not freely to him as he did to many, to Mervyn Peake and wife in times of poverty and need, and to Stanley Spencer, who appreciated the quality of a people as he appreciated a Moore, both as an artist and a man. With them he transcended self-interest and self-consciousness.

An aging man himself, especially observant of the ways of age in others—the great famous seem more than the grey and shabby in their own. While he strikes a vivid and dual note, it is always in describing some aspect of human disintegration. Stevie Smith, for example, in 1965 looked "some extraordinary old lady" very small, creeping about, and eyes as "black as ink" and "saucers". She looks a lunatic and T. S. Eliot, "enclosed" "descending the stairs" (he always "descend" here, not "down") at Faversham in 1957:

He was dressed in dark old overcoat, a soft hat. His face was exceedingly lined and he seemed very melancholy, and shuffling. He passed by me through the hall door, his long white hair, as it were, matted by gloom.

Elsewhere he reminds Eliot: "once saw him putting his round the door of his office. Fabers, dressed as St. Christmas. Eliot denied that he ever dressed up as St. Christmas. There must have been creatively crazy streak under his controlled, unblinking face who is shown in this selection of his diaries; the Collis who had miserable wives and many affairs, the Collis who believed the prophecies of a Burmese priest and whose house in Burma was riddled by porters; the "the groundswell of war" which was an essential part of nature, and which in his last years became more difficult to control. "I am Maurice Collis" have written thirty-five books. Perhaps the answer to this character is in the fact that he was not in the diaries, and it is curiosity about a diarist leads readers to search him in his books, this public will find its justification.

On the defensive

By John Vincent

NORMAN GASH, DONALD SOUTHGATE, DAVID DILKS and JOHN RAMSDEN:
The Conservatives
A History from their Origins to 1965
Edited with an Introduction and Epilogue by the Rt Hon Lord Butler
492pp. George Allen and Unwin. £7.50.

IAN GILMOUR:
Inside Right
A Study of Conservatism
294pp. Hutchinson. £5.95.

NIGEL FISHER:
The Tory Leaders
Their Struggle for Power
209pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £5.95.

There are two schools of thought about the history of the Conservative Party, held by most Conservatives, sees the party and its principles as eternally betrayed by leaders who at best never put the clock back and at worst are only too happy to outbid their supposed opponents. The other view, held by most historians, is that Conservative leaders have been fine men anxious to meet the needs of the time, but fatally hampered by the retrograde tendencies of the men who put them into power. The ideal Tory leader, in this view, should be by disbelieving in his party, preferably after not having believed very much in it in the first place; and here Lord Butler may serve as a living example. Taking heed of Churchill's advice that controversies should be left to the judgment of history, provided that one writes (or edits) the history oneself, he offers in *The Conservatives* a version of Conservative history which concentrates on misunderstood leaders.

Norman Gash, though (I presume) of impeccable Conservative credentials, is really the last of the great Whig historians in technique and outlook. He is all Peel and no Wellington, all Liverpool and no Disraeli, all Chamberlain and no Eton. He is somewhat turning away from the fact that without Wellington and Eton, there would have been no party—and there were far more oddly reactionary figures around than Wellington and Eton. What Professor Gash delights to explain and dwell upon are those elements within Conservative government which led up to the mid-Victorian harmony; and this is surely Whig history. Donald Southgate covers the whole period from 1846 to 1922 in what is the longest contribution to *The Conservatives*. In effect he has offered a detailed political history of the period such as might be found in a university vivacious textbook. His remarkably superior of the Coleridge-Southey theory of an organic society suggest that, despite his reliance for the knacks of party warfare, he like Professor Gash, does not wish to see the acknowledged roots of Conservatism in principle and class conflict. David Dilks gives a trailer of his forthcoming book on Neville Chamberlain, who emerges as good by any standards, partly because he wished to abolish the very title of "Conservative Party," until Professor Dilks's full biography appears, probably in late 1979, this exposition of Chamberlain's key ideas as expressed in his papers will be required reading.

John Ramsden hints, I think correctly, at the inner insecurity of post-war Conservatism, but has little to go on except the newspapers and what some leading Conservatives, notably the former Sir Michael Fraser, have told him. His argument that the operative point about organization in the 1945 election was not that both parties were disorganized, but that it was the only modern election where the Conservatives did not enjoy a substantial advantage in organization, is worth remembering. For the party loyalist seeking a briefing this book has its points; but the academic librarian may wish to await the multi-volume party biography announced by Longmans.

Ian Gilmour and Nigel Fisher write as practising politicians willing to market their share of Westminster folklore. Gilmour gives

away rather less because of his ministerial standing. Gilmour's main motive in *Inside Right* is political. The other view, held by most historians, is that Conservative leaders have been fine men anxious to meet the needs of the time, but fatally hampered by the retrograde tendencies of the men who put them into power. The ideal Tory leader, in this view, should be by disbelieving in his party, preferably after not having believed very much in it in the first place; and here Lord Butler may serve as a living example. Taking heed of Churchill's advice that controversies should be left to the judgment of history, provided that one writes (or edits) the history oneself, he offers in *The Conservatives* a version of Conservative history which concentrates on misunderstood leaders.

The spectacle of an ex-minister thus at ease among his books almost defines, one fears, the kind of politician the modern world has no wish to have. After his tour d'horizon, Gilmour provides a diagnosis of the present, occupying a little more than half the book. It is characteristic that he sets out to be scathing about Wilson and Social Democracy, but does not get very far, while warning of his work in denouncing Powell as demagogue and opportunist. Let us not expect what is against nature. Let us not expect an Etonian of high character to be too horrified by the Labour Party being full of bad hats, or by the middle classes lowering the tone of public life. Mr Wilson may indeed be the Disraeli of Socialism, but he will only find his Julius among those men of his own kind whose bourgeois revolution he betrayed.

Gilmour's conclusions are rather cramping. The Conservatives must avoid being the party of industry; in any case, industrialists would only avoid commitment to economic liberalism. They must avoid Powellism, in the sense of an approach to the working class in its own terms. They must avoid too much emphasis on managerial affairs, as well as too much ideology. They should not base their appeal on Christianity, patriotism, or the overwhelming threat from the Soviet military complex, to which Gilmour, a former Defence Secretary, only alludes as a marginal feature of contemporary life. This leaves little for the Tories to do. They should, it appears, be upper-class "healers" who can win working-class support by deploying in public life the private conception of virtue of a secure middle class. The snag, surely, is that Gilmour's prescription of common sense, consensus, national unity, and opposition to dogma can be carried out just as well, perhaps better, by other parties.

Churchill when Prime Minister talked to Gilmour about coloured immigration, saying: "this is the most important subject facing this country, but I cannot get any of my Ministers to take any notice." Nigel Fisher's object in *The Tory Leaders* is to give us similar glimpses behind the scenes, and not much more. An MP since 1950, he is well qualified to write on the making or toppling of the past six Conservative leaders, and the procedures involved. He has consulted a whole generation of senior Tories, and this and a developed journalistic instinct ensure that his book is a useful source of historical evidence. Fisher, who dedicates his book to his father-in-law, a pre-war National Liberal, is rather in the Conservative Party than of it, and it is surprising to find that he was closely involved, as a du Cane supporter and a member of the Executive of the 1922 Committee, in some of the conclusions which led to Mrs Thatcher's election, including the once notorious meeting of the "Milk Street Mafia" at du Cane's bank.

Fisher tells the story so far as the 1922 Committee and its Executive were concerned, and they were very much at the centre of things in forcing an election for the leadership. He also gives an account of proceedings within the "du Cane group", which makes it sound a very innocent affair. On some points he is non-partisan. He explains that the party outside Parliament wished strongly to retain Mr Heath as leader, even though his views though known were clearly disregarded. (Mr Heath's present popularity in the bookshops is not so much a bizarre reversal of opinion in autumn 1974 as the continuation of a strong loyalty present at that time.) Fisher's most contentious point is that while Butler will not, apparently, melt in Mr du Cane's mouth, the Heath camp resorted to a whole series of dirty tricks. As Mr Fisher was, in his own words, "kissed on both cheeks" by Mrs Thatcher when the results were announced, he is not perhaps the most detached judge of these fine questions of political ethics. However, whichever side one takes on the formal proceedings of autumn 1974 have left no ground for recrimination.

Fisher's other assessments of leadership crises necessarily cover more familiar ground, but he puts the information together in a handy if prosaic way and at points enlarges our knowledge of details and anecdotes. Though these three books inhabit a borderland between what one reads on the train and what is required reading for a knowledge of the subject, this only reflects Heath's meaning that Conservatives believe in the relative unimportance of politics. Fisher discusses Conservative political practice as it might appear to a lobby journalist; Gilmour examines Conservative ideas as they appear from the front bench; Lord Butler's team provides a loose-knit party history which is described on the blurb as "a happy vade mecum for parliamentary candidates". All they have in common is the defensiveness of a party that believes it ought to lose.

On the agenda

By Paul Langford

SHEILA LAMBERT (Editor):
House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century
Volume 1: Introduction and List, 1715-1760. 226pp.
Volume 2: List, 1761-1800. 483pp.
Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources.

A facsimile reproduction of the House of Commons sessional papers of the eighteenth century in itself constitutes a valuable service to historians of the period, whatever their particular interest. But it is still more of service when it comes with two introductory volumes as excellent as Sheila Lambert's. The extensive list which accompanies the greater part of these volumes is useful both as a reference work for the identification and dating of parliamentary reports, accounts and other papers, and as a guide to the range and complexity of business before the legislature. Moreover, her introductory remarks amount to a superbly concise and scholarly study of the House of Commons, providing a masterly survey of the procedures of the lower house.

Her description of the way in which sessional papers were requested, supplied and recorded, her account of the processes by which the Commons's orders, votes and journals were produced, and her analysis of the interplay of public and private bills all provide a clear guide to their subject, and incidentally correct some of the misapprehensions which may arise from a superficial examination of the journals themselves or contemporary parliamentary reports. There are many incidental pleasures, like the author's discussion of the problems of legislative revision, and her warnings, as to the hazards of committee reports. Altogether, this is a book which should be read by P. D. G. Thomas's *House of Commons in the Eighteenth Century*, gives us the clearest picture yet provided of the processes of debate and law-making in the eighteenth-century legislature.

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Brian Way

Studies in English Literature 69

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Christopher Prendergast

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BODLEY
HEAD

TLS Commentary

Reading the Carol

BBC2, showing yet another *Christmas Carol* on Christmas Eve (with Michael Hordern as an excellent Scrooge), was simply ordering, in Tony Weller's phrase, yet another glass of the invariable, for how could the BBC get through Christmas without Dickens? But Argus, releasing in December their records (ZSW 584/5, £5 the set) of Roy Dotrice's reading of the *Carol*, were starting something. Mr Dotrice, fresh from his triumph, or rather his individual honours, as the novelist in Yorkshire Television's

lamentable *Dickens of London*, is only because we know so thoroughly how Dickens performed but also because Mr Dotrice borrows from him some of his verbal curlicues, recorded in press reports but not included in the reading versions which he published. Dickens always read the opening sentences of the *Carol*, wrote a contemporary observer, in "cheery, comfortable tones, indicative of a double relish on the part of the narrator—in wit, his own enjoyment of the tale he is

effects, in detail or in general: but a comparison is irresistible, not only because we know so thoroughly how Dickens performed but also because Mr Dotrice borrows from him some of his verbal curlicues, recorded in press reports but not included in the reading versions which he published. Dickens always read the opening sentences of the *Carol*, wrote a contemporary observer, in "cheery, comfortable tones, indicative of a double relish on the part of the narrator—in wit, his own enjoyment of the tale he is



An early but unmistakable example of the line of Edward Gorey: from the *Harvard Advocate* anthology discussed below

A Harvard harvest

Harvard has been around long enough for even the most insular Englishman to recognize it, and the *Harvard Advocate* celebrated its 110th birthday in 1976 by undertaking the publication of a history-cum-anthology. First *Flowering*, edited by Richard M. Smoley (336pp, Addison-Wesley Publications, £12).

This comes with a preface by Norman Meisler, largely concerned with the misdeeds of the editor under whom he served and a party which Maier is entertainingly combative, and an introduction by Robert Fitzgerald, too brief to explain to the thesaurus-Englishman the relations between the *Advocate* and other Harvard periodicals; he must turn to a piece called "Our Predecessors and Our Contemporaries" to learn that "a *Daily Crimson* is needed to supply the news of the day, a *Lampy* to lighten our heavy academic burdens with his jokes, a *Harvard Monthly* to lift our souls to a higher and nobler plane of thought and the *Advocate* to fill its own particular sphere". But that was in 1885 and things may have changed.

In those years the magazine stood for the admission of women ("let the blessed light of civilization permeate the 'barbaric' and 'dark' square against Walt Whitman," Wagner, Wagner, Wagner, and four square against Walt Whitman), "nobody can force us to drink from the polluted bucket which a maniac has filled and which English sensuality has raised to our lips". Soon, too, a faculty member was denouncing "a piece of naive Japonaiserie for the indecent story which might be excusable in a foreigner ignorant of American standards". Fortunately for the *Advocate*, the American Standard was to prove more flexible than the Harvard Yard. Edward Acland, son of Robinson's balladeer and triplets Wallace Stevens, Van Wyck Brooks and T. S. Eliot—the Jurassic age of the *Advocate*, E. E. Cummings, however, was still startlingly traditional: "There's a fall upon the night like a single word, like a syllable of that eternal prayer, 'Amen'." By the 1920s, the former editors and contributors were subjects of parody in, say, *Wally* Dyer, who were

aimed at "T. S. Teletail" and "O. O. Golings"; in sober earnest the Lloyd McKim Garrison prize went to a sequence of wretchedly fawning sonnets to Mussolini ("Crushed by thy strength, the Socialist crystal ball/lies shattered...").

The next decade was livelier, with editor James Laughlin and his mentor Henry Miller getting the local DA decided against jailing these young writers with their illustrious grandeur—allegedly. Contributions were solicited from distinctly non-Harvard persons like Ezra Pound—though one of his pieces collected here was reprinted from the *New English Weekly*. Meanwhile young Arthur Schlesinger Jr. (class of '38) shrewdly observed that the magazine was "submerged by debt for four years, but surfaced with a cargo of new poetry—Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery, Richard Wilbur. Edward Gorey drew the pictures."

The contemporary horizon is represented largely by contributions from outsiders or eminent alumni: Lowell, Burroughs, Auden, Berryman, Eliot, D. S. G. (1970 attack, "Ge. A. W. Richard Brautigan, you're not helping College Poetry Any"), protests the inert utility of undergraduate verse in an extended culinary metaphor. The wheel completes its turn with a 1976 article which radiates an affluent self-content which would not have been out of tune in the first number.

First *Flowering* is a handsome quarto, though the technique of semi-facsimile is confusing, and some at least of the typographical errors are not in the original (there is very large type on the very first page). The advertisement from early issues promises non-literary satisfactions: English Mutton Chops a specialty at Frank C. Fellows Pool Hall; boatman on a Columbia bicycle; head of the class, envied by all, with Memory Restorative Tablets, which greatly augment intellectual power for a dollar, postpaid. So that's how they did it.

Mr. Stephen McKenna, always a crowded background for his

going to relate, and his wife, the enjoyment of it by the... There was "a sense of... in the very manner... Dickens commenced the...

Mr Dotrice does not reproduce this effect. The... is clear and businesslike... than it is exhilarating... interpretation is of a piece... beautiful passage aimed at... which rarely reminded... omitted to arrange a Courbet re... Thomas Adolphus Trollope... the general charm of the... the manner, I despair of giving... to those who have no... it was a heavy... a large-hearted man, per... largest-hearted man I ever... Sir Bernard Miles, in his... of the *Carol* (EMI CF... more hearty, as is app... the heartiest of Dickens... and was more aware... Zola saw Delacroix, Ingres and... in these ghostly passages Courbet as the three greatest... Dickens, in the margins of his... reading copy, indicated the... effect: "Tune to Mystery".

Mr Dotrice is more wrought by the Impressionists and in his characterizations, and the Symbolists. He saw a grandeur... has plenty of opportunity to... his expertise in this... and twenty-fold speakers to... it comes as a surprise that... speech occurs, so rarely in... parts from it. Some... the 1843 original, cut by... are here restored, proba... the four disc sides. 01848? How much by emulation of... other hand, I believe... the burden of sustaining... "Sir Roger de Coverley" and... which seems over-sollicitous... Courbet seems jocose and... against injustice by the health... a fiddler during the... and church-halls during the... and only "message" is the central... and at the city of Courbet, with... the choir of St... Courbet, maitre-peintre, sans... Shup! it must be... a character actor. Maybe... imitatable under-stand of... entertainment, the illustrious... has wondered whether Mr... is a shade too much... of the transcendental but of... phonic record is naturally... a private and domestic... Courbet, maitre-peintre, sans... Shup! it must be... a character actor. Maybe... imitatable under-stand of... entertainment, the illustrious... has wondered whether Mr... is a shade too much... of the transcendental but of... phonic record is naturally... a private and domestic...

In a half-century, the... sound-effects are... a fiddler during the... and church-halls during the... and only "message" is the central... and at the city of Courbet, with... the choir of St... Courbet, maitre-peintre, sans... Shup! it must be... a character actor. Maybe... imitatable under-stand of... entertainment, the illustrious... has wondered whether Mr... is a shade too much... of the transcendental but of... phonic record is naturally... a private and domestic... Courbet, maitre-peintre, sans... Shup! it must be... a character actor. Maybe... imitatable under-stand of... entertainment, the illustrious... has wondered whether Mr... is a shade too much... of the transcendental but of... phonic record is naturally... a private and domestic...

Philip Colby

The last of the Old Masters

By Anita Brookner



Courbet's "Le Sommeil", 1866, lent by the Petit Palais, Paris, for the Royal Academy exhibition

and not much else. Mme Grégoire, the light glinting on her well-fed face, is the patroness of this festival. Rumples, sleazy girls, exhibiting their cheap mien and their white stockings to the shocked spectator, overweight bourgeois, Régis Courbet, snoozing after dinner in his malodorous but convivial kitchen, trout the size of carp, yards of female hair, sniggering silted parties, resplendent damp-fleshed nudes, an amazing tendency for everyone to fall asleep; all this signals a consciousness at ease as long as the flesh is buoyant, a near absence of thought. This contentment is borne out by the fact that with the encroachment of illness Courbet declined immediately as a painter and as a personality. Imprisoned in St Pelagie, he seems to be waiting politely for help. And exiled to La Tour de Peilz, that silent, pretty village where it seems to be always dusk, he contributes less to the history of art than to the mythology of boozing.

Yet it must be remembered that we know very little about him and probably always shall, for his sister Juliette destroyed all his papers after his death. Perhaps, for all his outrageous vanity, he was a defensive man. With perseverance one can find in him a thread of gravity. That portrait of Berlioz, as watchful, as disinterested as might have been his doctor father at the bedside of a dying man; Mme de Brayer, emerging from shadow with an immanence worthy of Chassériau;

the hooked trout, with agonized human eyes; a burning and picture of apples with a power tankard; a coldy red sunset over Lake Geneva; a modulation from complacency to reluctance in the portrait; all, admittedly, are dragged down by the copious use of bitumen but they nevertheless constitute a departure from the compulsively sociable figurehead that Courbet decided to be for the benefit of his friends. And very little of this has anything to do with philosophies of art.

To make sense out of Realism, the movement which has so bedevilled and in some cases falsified assessment of Courbet, is the task of the historian. But one thing is certain: Realism emerges from Romanticism as the child emancipated itself from the parent. Courbet himself began his painting career well within the Romantic tradition of the grasses, meadows, adhering to the same scale and colour values as those used by David and Gros. His early self-portraits, with their ambrosious self-regard, their insistent contention of the author's personality with that of the spectator, are not too far distant in format from Gérard's late portrait of "Le Vendeur" or Delacroix's self-portrait of c. 1837 in the Louvre. Realism may well have seemed the contemporary alternative to Romanticism which dated rapidly because of its recognizable and in many cases obsolescent subject-matter. Hence the insistence, in the 1840s, on the "cheerfulness" of the "new" Realism, demands met to a certain extent by Realism.

But this was no easy alternative. Champfleury, the critic who was Courbet's most insistent champion, wrote in the preface to his novel, *Monteur de Bédouilles*, "le métier de chercheur de la Réalité est peut-être plus dur que celui de bûcheron". The image of the woodcutter is significant and perhaps ostentatiously popular; it is certainly quite irrelevant to the gentle temper of the story. Less gentle is Flaubert's treatment of Emma Bovary, that born Romantic martyred in the cause of Realism. It is only Flaubert's fastidious irony that elevates her into anything like a distinction. Socially, she is of the same milieu as Courbet, the "Démolisseuses de Villages". In none of these cases is there any of that regard for popular causes that is said to distinguish Realism from its elitist predecessors. And despite the plain speaking of Courbet's intentions, his is in no sense a democratic painting. His subject-matter may be drawn from the pastimes and preoccupations of the labouring classes—hence the anxiety it aroused in the redoubtably bourgeois public—but these are in all cases subjected to a purely pictorial conscience.

If that pictorial conscience seems uneven, if some of the images re-

main blank, that too is well within the Realist programme. The Goncourts made a telling mistake in *Monette Salomon*, their novel about the Paris art world in the 1840s and 1850s. Coriols, the painter hero, sends two would-be Realist works to the Salon of 1855. Lovingly described by the brothers, these fictitious canvases bristle with plot and sub-plot. They are anecdotal, and Realist composition is anecdotal. Many of Courbet's images have an accidental quality. In "Le Treillis", for example, carnations, convolvulus, tiger lilies and phlox crowd into the front plane of the picture, eating up the air, while a hefty but curiously insubstantial girl tends them somewhere off to the right. Champfleury looks downwards to the least important angle of the canvas. Gamekeepers near Orans aside across our field of vision and keep their purpose to themselves. This maddened Delacroix, "Que voulez-vous deux figures?" was his unanswered (and unanswerable) question when he saw the notorious "Baigneuse". To this day art historians are striving to interpret the large and frightening picture called, variously, "La Toilette" (or "Le Repas") or "de la Marée" (or "de la Mort").

If there is a disappointing aside to Courbet it lies in the loss of effect that his limited objectivity entails. A case could be made out for his being as faithful to the inside of his head as Delacroix was to the inside of his, but Courbet did not remain puzzled by what was about him. He was too busy denying that anything outside his experience had any validity or indeed existence. The loss of effect is shared, not by his historical champion, Champfleury, but by his moral champion, Zola. One suspects that both saw Realism as a function of vitality and adapted their styles accordingly.

To the materialists of today—and that is all of us—Courbet must be the quintessential painter. Beyond the damaged enigma of the paint there is nothing that is not well able. There is nothing redemptive either. But to use this term immediately takes one into the painful territory inhabited by Baudelaire, with whom, incredibly enough, Courbet shared lodgings at one point. In the preface to *Montpellier*, Courbet saw his friend as an uneasy mixture of galley-slave and monk. In the *Salon* of 1855 Baudelaire dismissed Courbet with a politeness worthy of Delacroix. "Sans idéal et sans religion" is an existential programme, valid only for the length of time one is capable of sustaining the fully responsible and responsive attitude in life that such a proposition entails. As the Royal Academy can be seen but these are in all cases subjected to a purely pictorial conscience.

The exhibition closes on March 19.

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